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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000144

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: LOWER NORTH'S TAKE ON NEW GOVERNMENT: NEXT MOVE WILL COME  
FROM COURTS, NOT POLITICIANS

CHIANG MAI 00000144 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Mike Morrow, CG, ConGen, Chiang Mai.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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Summary and Comment  
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[¶1.](#) (C) Consul General discussed Thailand's national political impasse with parliamentarians and governors during a recent trip to two lower north provinces. While all interlocutors, including two opposition MPs, saw new Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat as an improvement over his mercurial predecessor, none anticipated that the country's political leaders would be able to end the stand-off in the near term. Instead, they appeared to expect the political drama's next chapter to open with a consequence-forcing event in the form of a Constitutional Court decision to dissolve the governing People's Power Party and two of its coalition members - leading to new elections and another new government. On this backdrop, expectations are low that issues of importance to the lower north, mostly related to safeguarding and expanding crop production, will be addressed or resolved anytime soon. End Summary and Comment.

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CG Gets Lower North's Take on National Politics  
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[¶2.](#) (U) Consul General traveled to the lower north provinces of Sukhothai and Uttaradit September 22-23. He met with both provinces' governors and as well as three members of parliament from Sukhothai (see para 9 below for names). Both provinces have smallish populations and primarily agrarian economies. Uttaradit has long been a stronghold for the governing People's Power Party (PPP) and its Thai Rak Thai (TRT) antecedent. Those parties have held all three of the province's parliamentary seats since 2001. Sukhothai, on the other hand, has become more politically mixed. TRT swept all four of the province's seats in the 2001 and 2005 elections, then lost all four in 2007 - two to the opposition Democrat Party (DP), and two to smaller parties that become junior partners of the PPP-led coalition government. Sukhothai, in fact, is the only one of Thailand's 16 northern provinces in which PPP/TRT lost more than two seats when comparing the 2007 elections to TRT's maiden showing in [¶2001](#).

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A Tale of Two PADs  
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[¶3.](#) (C) Sukhothai's two Democrat Party MPs distanced themselves from the anti-government Popular Alliance for Democracy (PAD) that has occupied the Government House in Bangkok since late August. They told CG that many of PAD's demands went too far, particularly the call for "New Politics" in which a portion of

parliamentarians would be appointed or indirectly elected. At the same time, PAD's assertion of incompetence by the PPP-led government of former Prime Minister Samak resonated among many DP supporters. The DP MPs also credited PAD with helping to deter the development of what they described as a parliamentary "dictatorship" under the PPP-led coalition.

14. (C) PAD was characterized less charitably by Sukhothai's MP from the Chart Thai party, the second largest of PPP's four coalition partners. He criticized PAD for issuing new and ever-changing political demands. He suspects PAD has "official" support and was created as a tool to weaken TRT and its leader, former Prime Minister Thaksin. He anticipates PAD will fade away soon now that its original demands - the ouster of PM Samak and cessation of PPP-led attempts to amend the Constitution - have been met. PAD's latest demands, such as "New Politics," do not have wide resonance across the Thai polity.

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New Government: An Improvement . . .  
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15. (C) The DP MPs called new PM Somchai Wongsawat "a reasonable man." However, they doubted his selection of "the same old faces" for his cabinet would do anything to ease the current political standoff. The country's political division goes beyond the composition and policies of the government; at issue are the role and legacy of former PM Thaksin, intertwined with the matters of corruption and good governance. The DP members called for stamping out vote-buying, and breaking the public's addiction to PPP/TRT populist policies, which they described as "vote-buying in advance."

16. (C) The Chart Thai MP said his party was 100% behind PM Somchai. He believes Somchai's easier manner compared to that of the mercurial Samak, together with the lack of public

CHIANG MAI 00000144 002.2 OF 002

enthusiasm for PAD's "New Politics" proposal, would help the two sides forge a way out of the immediate standoff at Government House. In his view, PAD needed a face-saving way out of the impasse that would still satisfy its core supporters, and Somchai could help PAD attain that.

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. . . But Short-Lived  
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17. (C) Nonetheless, all three MPs, as well as both governors CG met with, considered the Somchai government to be short-lived. The Uttaradit governor expected that upcoming Constitutional Court rulings on electoral improprieties committed by PPP, Chart Thai, and a third coalition party would result in the dissolution of all three parties, followed by new elections. The Chart Thai MP also expressed concern about the looming court-ordered dissolution.

18. (C) The political stand-off in Bangkok, and the low expectations for the new government, are reasons to doubt that issues of importance to the lower north will be addressed or resolved in the near term. While CG's interlocutors reported that the region's farmers were reaping the benefits of higher produce prices, especially for rice, other concerns loom. Lack of investment in reservoirs, irrigation systems, and flood control continues to be a threat to safeguarding and expanding crop production. Farming price supports are another unmet concern, as is government help in breaking down agricultural trade barriers in order to access foreign markets. Investment in the education sector and promotion of the tourism sector were also mentioned. The two governors asserted that the professional civil service (of which both are members) had the wherewithal to administer most of the region's needs, but admitted that the largest projects would not move forward without the backing of the central government.

## Sources

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19. (U) The officials noted above (all male) are:

Wirat Wiriyaphong, Democrat Party MP, Sukhothai  
Samphan Tangbeenchapol, Democrat Party MP, Sukhothai  
Somchet Limpraphan, Chat Thai MP, Sukhothai  
Wanchai Suthin, Governor of Sukhothai Province  
Thawatchai Faak-angkun, Governor of Uttaradit Province  
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